

John Taylor Arms Manuscripts

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Summary Information

Repository	Ingalls Library and Museum Archives
Creator	Arms, John Taylor, 1887-1953
Title	John Taylor Arms Manuscripts
Date	1911 to 1971
Extent	6.0 Cubic feet [10 boxes]
Language	English

Preferred Citation note

John Taylor Arms Manuscripts, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives

Biographical/Historical note

John Taylor Arms was born in Washington D.C. in 1887. After attending Princeton for two years, he transferred to Massachusetts Institute of Technology to study architecture. He graduated in 1911 and the following year received his masters. His B.S. thesis was on "A Renaissance Cathedral in France." After graduation he worked at two architecture firms, becoming a partner at the latter. In 1913 he married Dorothy Frothingham Noyes. Dorothy gave John Taylor his first etching kit and continued to support him throughout his career. Arms dissolved his partnership at the architecture firm to serve in the Navy after America declared war in 1916. After being discharged in 1919, Arms devoted himself to his art. During his career he created numerous etchings and aquatints and was a strong advocate for the arts and artists belonging to several societies. Arms died in 1953.

Scope and Contents note

With a few outliers, this collection spans from 1911 to 1953. It is composed of mostly bound manuscripts with the diaries making up the bulk of the collection. The collection is divided into five series, Diaries, Catalog of Work, Ephemera, Art Collection, and Photographs. Where possible, it was arranged chronologically or alphabetically.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Ingalls Library and Museum Archives

Conditions Governing Access note

Open to the public. For more information or to access this collection contact archives staff at archives2@clevelandart.org.

Processing Information note

Processed by Peter Buettner, August 2014

Controlled Access Headings

Personal Name(s)

- Arms, Dorothy Noyes, 1887-
- Kropfl, Ulrich

Subject(s)

- Art--Private collections
- Engravers.
- Graphic arts

General note

John Taylor Arms (1887–1953) is one of the foremost American printmakers of the first half of the 20th century. Trained as an architect, he spent the majority of his 50-year career documenting Europe's great Gothic churches. Arms believed that art could be a tool for the spiritual and moral improvement of mankind and that Gothic cathedrals represented "the most significant expression of man's aspirations." He viewed printmaking as a vehicle for disseminating images of subjects that would uplift and inspire contemporary society.

Over several decades Arms traveled throughout France, Italy, England, and Spain drawing Gothic structures. These studies were the basis for the etchings he produced back in his Connecticut studio. Arms admired the craftsmanship of medieval art and used fine-gauge sewing needles set into wooden handles and magnifying glasses to draw the elaborate churches on copper plates. Extremely dedicated and industrious, Arms rendered each building with exceptional precision, spending 1,000 hours or more on a single plate. A gifted draftsman, Arms used only line to describe the texture of old stone, for instance, and to achieve a variety of tones. A technical virtuoso, he created compositions full of keenly observed details and nuanced light. Although the plates were most often printed with black ink, they are sometimes printed on pale blue antique paper or with colored ink.

Arms created more than 400 prints that explore a variety of subjects in addition to Gothic cathedrals. He began his printmaking career in 1916—after his wife gave him an etching set for Christmas—by depicting the architecture of New York City. After celebrating such marvels as the Woolworth building, however,

he wrote, "I can admire the skyscrapers of New York, that unbelievable city which is a very gold mine for the architectural etcher, but I do not love them and I cannot etch what I do not love." Arms studied the crumbling palazzo of medieval Venice where he overcame the challenge of mimicking the texture of decaying stonework and capturing watery reflections. In England he focused on the rural settings of parish churches and picturesque villages. In Italy he produced wonderful views of towns nestled in the hilly countryside. A sailor during World War I, Arms retained a great love of the sea and etched naval warships throughout World War II. Since travel restrictions curtailed the artist's trips to Europe, a sojourn to Mexico resulted in impressive depictions of Taxco and the Yucatan Peninsula.

- Jane Glaubinger, PhD., Curator of Prints, Cleveland Museum of Art

Collection Inventory

Diaries 1923-1953

Scope and Contents note

Arranged chronologically by year, this series is almost completely continuous for the last thirty years of Arms's life. From 1923 to 1953, daily entries begin with a description of the weather followed by a brief account of the day's activities. Lastly, Arms gives a tally of the hours worked on art projects.

	Box	Folder
Diary (Book 2) 1923-1924	1	1
Diary 1926	1	2
Diary, France 1928	1	3
Diary, Italy 1929	1	4
Diary, Italy 1930	1	5
Diary, A Line a Day 1932-1936	1	6
Diary, A Line a Day 1937-1940	1	7
Diary 1938	2	1

Diaries

Diary 1941	2	2
Diary 1942	2	3
Diary 1943	2	4
Diary 1944	3	1
Diary 1945	3	2
Diary 1946	3	3
Diary 1947	3	4
Diary 1948	4	1
Diary 1949	4	2
Diary 1950	4	3
Diary, Appointment Book 1950	4	4
Diary 1951	5	1
Diary 1952	5	2
Diary 1953	5	3

Catalog of Work

Catalog of Work 1914-1971

Scope and Contents note

This series consists of various versions of an unpublished catalog raisonn  ; a typed manuscript in four volumes by Ulrich Kropfl, a list of published prints, and a card catalog of works. The last two were probably written and arranged by Arms. The similarities throughout all three suggests the volumes by Kropfl are a reworking of the two by Arms.

	Box	Folder
A Catalog of the Works of John Taylor Arms, N.A., A.R.E., P.S.A.E. Volume I, by Ulrich Kropfl 1971	6	1
A Catalog of the Works of John Taylor Arms, N.A., A.R.E., P.S.A.E. Volume II, by Ulrich Kropfl 1971	6	2
A Catalog of the Works of John Taylor Arms, N.A., A.R.E., P.S.A.E. Volume III, by Ulrich Kropfl 1971	6	3
A Catalog of the Works of John Taylor Arms, N.A., A.R.E., P.S.A.E. Volume IV, by Ulrich Kropfl 1971	7	1
The Published Plates of John Taylor Arms 1914 - 1953	7	2
Card Catalog of Works 1914-1953	9	1

Ephemera 1887-1955

Scope and Contents note

Art Collection

The ephemera series comprises important documents, exhibition catalogs, and a scrapbook of business cards, sales catalogs, and receipts. The scrapbook has been divided amongst two folders.

	Box	Folder
Customs Declaration for "This England" and "Snow Scene" October 1955	8	1
Exhibition Catalogs 1922-1954	8	2
Holy Baptism Certificate November 10, 1887	8	3
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "Class in Pen and Pencil," by D.A. Gregg circa 1910	8	4
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Thesis, "A Renaissance Cathedral in France" May 22, 1911	8	5
Sales Brochures, Receipts, and Business Cards, A-M	8	6
Sales Brochures, Receipts, and Business Cards, N-Z	8	7

Art Collection circa 1955

Scope and Contents note

This brief series offers a catalog of Arms's art collection. Arms mostly collected prints from other contemporary graphic artists. Henry Katz appraised the collection after Arms death in 1953. This series includes the appraisal and a tally of works by artist.

Box **Folder**

Photographs

Appraisal by Henry Katz 1953-1954	8	8
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Artists Included in the John Taylor Arms Collection	8	9
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Photographs

Scope and Contents note

The photograph series consists of loose photographs and albums. The loose photographs are arranged categorically. The albums contain photographs of family, vacations, fishing trips, and some professional activities.

Loose Photographs

	Box	Folder
Durer's House, Gaen, J.T.A. Family, Rome, and Unannotated	8	10
Etching Tools 1939	8	11
Navy circa 1917	8	12
Portrait by Louise Plympton, Fairfield Connecticut	8	13
Portrait by Conway Studios Inc., New York	8	14
Portrait	8	15

Photo Albums

Photo Albums circa 1917 to circa 1950 The covers of five photoalbums suffer from extreme redrot and deterioration.

	Box	Folder
Family Photos and Miscellaneous circa 1925 to circa 1950	10	1
Navy Photo Album circa 1917 to circa 1918	10	2
"Photographs" Album circa 1918 - 1920	10	3
Unnamed Larger Album circa 1920	10	4
Unnamed Smaller Album circa 1920	10	5